



Paul J. Diodati
Director

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Marine Fisheries
251 Causeway Street, Suite 400
Boston, MA 02114
(617) 626.1520
Fax (617) 626.1509



Deval Patrick
Governor
Timothy P.
Murray
Lt. Governor
Richard K.
Sullivan, Jr.
Secretary
Mary B.
Griffin
Commissioner

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Marine Fisheries Advisory

2012 Vibrio control plan rules effective June 22, 2012

To meet federal Food and Drug Administration mandates pertaining to the consumption of raw oysters and *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* ("vibrio") health related risks, the Division of Marine Fisheries (*Marine Fisheries*) has issued permit conditions to certain Massachusetts commercial shellfish permit holders and seafood dealers, which are effective June 22, 2012 through September 8, 2012. The permit conditions are designed to better regulate the time-temperature related conditions of the oyster harvest in Eastern Cape Cod Bay. The affected permit holders include those shellfish growers in Eastern Cape Cod Bay (Barnstable to Provincetown), wild shellfish harvesters in the town of Wellfleet and the seafood dealers that purchase product from these growers and harvesters.

In recent years, there has been an increased attention paid to the human health risk associated with consumption of raw shellfish, particularly oysters, due to the presence of the *vibrio* bacteria. *Vibrio* thrive in warmer temperatures with the bacteria multiplying faster as temperature increases. The more *vibrio* present in shellfish the greater the risk of infection; the consumption of raw shellfish with high counts of *vibrio* can cause gastrointestinal illness and in severe cases it can be lethal.

Many states south of Massachusetts are aggressively managing this risk through detailed and restrictive management plans. Until this point, Massachusetts has not, as our shellfish harvest and growing areas have not been subject to temperatures high enough to create significant

risk. However, due to warming air and water temperatures, this is no longer true and in 2011 two incidences of *vibrio* infection were traced back the consumption of raw seafood harvested in Eastern Cape Cod Bay. The tidal movements in Eastern Cape Cod Bay leave large shellfish harvest and growing areas exposed to the air and direct sunlight during low tide and during the warm summer months this exposure substantially increases the risk of infection.

To address this risk, *Marine Fisheries* and the Department of Public Health (DPH) have designed a series of time-cooling requirements to minimize the risk of *vibrio* infection. These restrictions will be in effect via permit condition for the 2012 summer season. *Marine Fisheries* and DPH is working to codify these permit conditions as regulations for 2013.

For more information, you may contact *Marine Fisheries* at 617-626-1520 or the Department of Public Health at 617-983-6700. To view the vibrio management plan, please visit:
www.mass.gov/marinefisheries.